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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on women elected to public office at the local and state level. A twelve page questionnaire was returned by 294 of the 592 women holding these offices. This first data analysis indicates that: (1) many of the women had parents or relatives who held public office; (2) more women over age 50 held office than those under 50; (3) the women identify more with their mothers than with their fathers; (4) education alone does not loom as important a factor as might be expected; and (5) younger women in office have less college education than older women. It is concluded that, when considering women in public life, certain established relationships between variables may not hold true. (TL)

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WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE IN WISCONSIN

A Preliminary Report

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Alverno Research Center on Women
MILWAUKEE WISCONSIN

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IN WISCONSIN

A Preliminary Report

April - 1971

Prepared By

Patricia Gorence Bach

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary assessment and evaluation of the status and influence of American women requires research into all areas of their social involvement--political, economic, cultural, etc.,--and all levels of their activity--local, state, national, and international.

In an attempt to contribute to this important area of investigation a study of women in public life in Wisconsin was undertaken by the Alverno Research Center on Women. The study, focusing on women elected to public office at the local and state levels, sought answers to the following questions:

Who are the women in Wisconsin who hold elective office: age, personal status, educational and work experience, etc.?

What factors--individuals or events--influenced their decision to run for office?

Are they represented in all offices or are they heavily concentrated in certain offices or levels of government?

Do they encounter any particular problems or enjoy certain advantages because they are women?

What has been the biggest handicap to overcome in entering political life?

Do they possess characteristics as a group that distinguish them from women who, though active in government and civic affairs, have not chosen to seek public office?

Do they resemble other groups of women, e.g., business executives, who have achieved success in a public sphere?

The following preliminary report was prepared for presentation and discussion at the Conference on Women in Public Life at Alverno College on April 28, 1971. It contains only the first analysis of the data and does not include either comparisons with control groups or interpretations based on more complex computer analysis of the data. The final report will contain these comparisons and interpretations.

METHODOLOGY

The research design centered principally in a twelve-page questionnaire which women in certain public offices in Wisconsin were asked to complete. Prior to drafting this instrument, pilot interviews were conducted with several women officeholders. The twelve-page instrument included not only requests for information of a biographical, educational, and political nature but also open-ended questions regarding influences and attitudes which the respondent thought played a significant role in her public life.

Similar questionnaires were also distributed to two League of Women Voter groups and two Homemakers' Clubs in the state in order to provide a basis for comparison between women in public office and those involved in community affairs but not holding public office. Analysis of the data from these groups is not included in this preliminary report.

The following offices were selected for study:

State Judges (State Supreme Court Justices, Circuit and County Court Judges and Municipal Justices of the Peace)
State Constitutional Officeholders
State Legislators
County Board Supervisors
County Clerks and Treasurers
City Mayors, Clerks, Treasurers, and Assessors
Village Presidents, Clerks, Treasurers, and Assessors
City Council Members, Village Trustees, and Members of Boards of Education in municipalities with a population of 10,000 or more based on the 1970 census

These particular offices were chosen for several reasons: they encompass the major offices on each level of government (state, county, city, and village); all branches of government (judicial, legislative, and executive) are represented; and they are highly visible to the public. The decision to focus on city council members, village trustees, and members of boards of education only in the 51 municipalities in the state with a population of at least 10,000 was made because complete data on other smaller communities was not available and also because these officeholders in the larger communities had responsibility for making decisions affecting a majority of the people in the state.

Most of the offices selected, 77%, are filled by election, but in some municipalities they are appointive positions. All the judicial, state, and county offices, as well as city council and village board positions are elective. Some of the village and city clerks and treasurers are appointed to office.

Of the 592 women holding these public offices, 294 or almost 50% responded to the questionnaire. For some of the offices, particularly those on the state and county level, the response was much greater. Table 1 contains a list of the offices, the total number of officeholders in each, the total number of women by office, and the percentage of response.

TABLE 1

LIST OF OFFICES, NUMBER OF OFFICEHOLDERS, NUMBER OF WOMEN IN OFFICE, AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSE

Public Office	Total # of Office-holders	Total # of Women in Office	Percent of Women in Office	Number & Percent of Women Answering Questionnaire	
Members of the Judiciary	373	8	2.1%	(5)	63%
State Supreme Court Justices	7	0	0		--
Circuit Court Judges	52	0	0		--
County Court Judges	123	1	.8%	(1)	100%
Municipal Justices of the Peace *	191	7	3.7%	(4)	57%
State Legislators	133	4	3.0%	(3)	75%
State Senators	33	0	0		--
State Representatives	100	4	4.0%	(3)	75%
County Supervisors **	2711	37	1.4%	(21)	57%
County Clerks	72	14	19.4%	(7)	50%
County Treasurers	71 ***	27	38.0%	(15)	56%
Mayors	186	1	.5%	(1)	100%
City Clerks	92	37	40.2%	(15)	41%
City Treasurers	82	40	48.8%	(17)	43%
City Clerk-Treasurers	80	22	27.5%	(14)	64%
City Clerk-Treasurer-Assessor	12	0	0		--
City Clerk-Assessors	2	0	0		--
Village Presidents	383	4	1.0%	(4)	100%
Village Clerks	275	113	41.1%	(52)	46%
Village Treasurers	279	132	47.3%	(47)	36%
Village Clerk-Treasurers	91	56	61.5%	(28)	50%
Village Clerk-Treasurer-Assessor	7	0	0		--
Village Clerk-Assessors	10	0	0		--
City and Village Assessors	508	15	3.0%	(4)	27%
City/Village Treasurer-Assessors ****	17	2	11.8%	(1)	50%
City Council Members and ** Village Trustees *****	539	21	3.9%	(17)	81%
Board of Education Members-City and Village	-- ******	59	--	(43)	73%

* Only 47 of Wisconsin's 72 counties have municipal justices of the peace.

** This includes two women who serve both as county supervisors and city council members in cities with a population of 10,000 or more.

*** As of January, 1971, one county, Green Lake, had a vacancy.

**** Because of the small number of women holding this position, the offices on the city and village level were combined.

***** This includes city council members and village trustees only in municipalities with a population of at least 10,000 based on the 1970 census.

****** Data is incomplete for the total number of board of education members. Figures here include only those boards of education in municipalities with a population of at least 10,000 based on the 1970 census.

DATA ON WOMEN IN PUBLIC OFFICE

The results of the study of women officeholders in Wisconsin are presented in this section in a series of tables. Although, as stated above, it would be premature to engage in a discussion or interpretation of the data in this preliminary report; where the results lend themselves to questions, these are raised.

Personal Status

Tables 2 and 3 include personal characteristics of the 294 women responding to the study.

TABLE 2

AGE OF RESPONDENTS

Age	Percent
21-30	4.6
31-40	13.6
41	31.3
51	30.3
61	16.3
71	3.1
No response	.7

TABLE 3

PERSONAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

Status	Percent
Single	9.9
Married	65.6
Divorced	4.1
Widowed	20.4

The percentage of widows in the group (20.4%) is relatively high in comparison to the percentage for the general population. As of March, 1969, the percentage of widows in the United States was 13.9%. Many of the women public officials stated that they had to find a job after the death of their husbands and that they sought public office because the position was part-time and work could be done in the home.

Women were asked to specify the number of children they had and the ages of the children. Tables 4 and 5 contain the responses.

Community Size and Location

About 76% of the women holding public office were born in Wisconsin with the remainder born in other parts of the United States. None of those responding was born in a foreign country. Most of the women were born in small, rural communities as Table 6 indicates. The majority of the women listing their birthplace as having a population of over 100,000 were born in the city of Milwaukee, the only city in the state before the 1950's with a population this size. Few were born in urban areas in other parts of the country.

TABLE 4

NUMBER OF CHILDREN OF MARRIED OR ONCE-MARRIED RESPONDENTS

Number	Percent
No children	15.5
1 child	13.9
2-3 children	38.1
4-5 children	21.1
6-7 children	7.1
8-9 children	3.0
More than 9 children	.4
No response	.8

TABLE 5

AGES OF CHILDREN

Ages	Percent
All over age 18	45
15-18 years of age	10
7-14 years of age	29
6 years or under	16

TABLE 6

SIZE OF BIRTHPLACE OF RESPONDENTS

Population of Birthplace (at time of birth)	Percent
Under 1,000	41.8
1,000 to 2,499	9.2
2,500 to 4,999	8.5
5,000 to 9,999	8.2
10,000 to 24,999	5.1
25,000 to 49,999	9.2
50,000 to 99,999	1.7
100,000 and over	11.9
No response	4.4

The number of years a woman has lived in her present community was also tabulated:

TABLE 7

YEARS LIVED IN PRESENT COMMUNITY

Number of Years	Percent
Since birth	32.3
All of adult life	30.6
At least three-fourths of adult life	19.0
One-half to three-fourths of adult life	8.8
One-fourth to one-half of adult life	1.7
Several years but less than one-fourth of adult life	4.8
Moved within the past year	1.0
No response	1.7

As indicated, 90% of the women holding public office have lived in their present community more than half of their adult lives.

Work Experience and Family Income

In the area of employment, almost one-third of the women responding indicated they were currently employed, in addition to serving as a public official. About 16.3% of the women worked full-time and 15% worked part-time, in addition to holding public office.

The women were asked to indicate the total number of years worked--full-time and part-time--excluding the time they served as public officials. The number of years worked was then figured as a percentage of their life to provide a better basis of comparison between the women, some of whom were in their 20's and others in their 70's.

TABLE 8

WORK EXPERIENCE OF RESPONDENTS

Total Number of Years Worked	Percent
Since teens	9.5
All of adult life	12.2
At least three-fourths of adult life	15.3
One-half to three-fourths of adult life	19.9
One-fourth to one-half of adult life	13.6
Several years but less than one-fourth of adult life	11.9
Two years or less	5.8
Never held jobs	7.8
No response	4.8

Combined family income, which is comprised of earnings of all household members including any salary from the woman's public office, is shown in Table 9.

TABLE 9

TOTAL FAMILY INCOME OF RESPONDENTS

Annual Family Income	Percent
Under $3,000	4.8
$3,000 to $4,999	7.5
$5,000 to $9,999	28.2
$10,000 to $14,999	29.9
$15,000 to $24,999	15.6
$25,000 and over	7.5
No response	6.4

In a further breakdown of this data, Tables 10 and 11 list the woman's income, including any salary from her public office, and the husband's income, where applicable. Of the 193 women who were married, 177 provided information on their husband's income.

TABLE 10

INDIVIDUAL INCOME OF RESPONDENTS

Woman's Income	Percent
None	3.4
Under $1,000	18.7
$1,000 to $2,999	22.8
$3,000 to $4,999	13.9
$5,000 to $6,999	11.2
$7,000 to $9,999	16.0
$10,000 to $14,999	9.2
$15,000 to $24,999	1.7
$25,000 and over	.7
No response	2.4

TABLE 11

INCOME OF HUSBANDS OF RESPONDENTS

Husband's Income	Percent
None	.3
Under $1,000	1.0
$1,000 to $2,999	4.1
$3,000 to $4,999	3.6
$5,000 to $6,999	12.4
$7,000 to $9,999	28.5
$10,000 to $14,999	25.4
$15,000 to $24,999	8.8
$25,000 and over	7.8
No response	8.0

The combined family incomes are relatively high when compared with the median income of about $10,000 for families in the United States. The husbands of married officeholders earn relatively high salaries, especially considering that most of these families live in smaller, rural Wisconsin communities.

Family Background

To gain a more complete picture of women in public office as a group, it is important to look at their family background and environment. Table 12 shows the women's placement in their families.

TABLE 12

PLACEMENT IN FAMILY OF RESPONDENTS

Family Placement	Percent
Only child	5.8
Oldest child	32.0
Oldest female child	9.9
Middle child	22.1
Youngest female child	8.2
Youngest child	20.1
Twins	1.0
No response	1.0

The data in Table 12 indicate that 47.7% of the group were either only children, the oldest, or the oldest female child in the family. This corresponds to other research findings on high achieving women.

Recent studies have shown that women who achieve success in various fields and professions, especially in non-traditional areas for women, have an exceptionally close attachment to their fathers. In this study, women were asked the following question: "Which parent were you closest to?" Unlike some previous studies, the resulting answers were more evenly split with mothers being favored as Table 13 indicates.

TABLE 13

PARENT THE RESPONDENT FELT CLOSEST TO

Closest Parent	Percent
Father	19.0
Mother	29.9
Both	36.7
Neither	4.8
No response	9.5

These figures remain relatively constant even when each public office is examined separately.

The father's work and income determined to a large extent the family's standard of living and social position. Tables 14 and 15 give the fathers' and mothers' occupations.

TABLE 14

OCCUPATIONS OF FATHERS

Occupation	Percent
Professional	6.8
Managerial	16.7
Sales	2.7
Clerks	2.0
Craftsmen/Foremen	16.0
Operatives (semi-skilled)	8.5
Laborers	10.2
Farmers	32.3
No response	4.7

TABLE 15

OCCUPATIONS OF MOTHERS

Occupation	Percent
Professional	2.4
Managerial	2.7
Sales	0.0
Clerks	1.7
Craftsmen/Operatives	2.0
Laborers	2.0
Farmers	.3
Homemakers	86.1
No response	2.7

An interesting finding was that many of the fathers, mothers, and other relatives of women now holding public office were themselves candidates for and served in public office at one time. Tables 16, 17, and 18 indicate the relationship as well as the years in office and the governmental level.

TABLE 16

FAMILY MEMBERS OF RELATIVES ELECTED TO PUBLIC OFFICE

Member Holding Public Office	Percent
Father	25.9
Mother	4.1
Other Relatives	38.4

TABLE 17

YEARS FATHER SERVED IN PUBLIC OFFICE

No. of Years Served	Percent
1-5 years	20
6-10 years	18
11-20 years	18
21 or more years	16
Don't know	5
No response	22

TABLE 18

LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT SERVICE OF FATHERS

Level	Percent
Township	22.3
Village or City	68.4
County	5.3
State	2.6
National	1.3
No response	0.0

As these tables indicate, the families of women now in public office have a history of public service in their particular communities. This may have provided some influence on women to seek public office themselves. Further analysis provided more significant statistics. When comparisons were made between various family members who held office, the following data was obtained:

--156 of the 294 respondents (53.1%) had a parent or other relative who served in public office.

--of the 156 women, 39 women or 25.0% had two of the following: father, mother, or other relatives who held public office.

--of the 156 women, 3 women, 1.9% of the total, had a father, mother, and other relatives serving in public office.

Additional analysis of the political involvement of family members and relatives and the relationship of this to other factors, such as placement in the family, years in the community and office held, might provide further insights and will be part of the complete report.

Parental Influence

Women in the study were asked: "In which of the following areas did your parents encourage or support you?" Numerous areas from employment to education were listed. Some of the responses are given in Table 19. As indicated, families of women holding public office seemed to place a high priority on their daughters' education. Encouragement or support received from parents in other areas varied considerably.

TABLE 19

PARENTAL ENCOURAGEMENT OR SUPPORT IN SPECIFIED AREAS

Parent	Pursue Education	Enter Politics	Marry and Be Housewife	Take Part in Church Affairs	Take Part in Civic Affairs
	Percent				
Father	6.1	4.4	.7	3.1	5.4
Mother	11.6	2.0	4.4	12.9	6.1
Both	53.7	7.8	17.3	38.4	27.2
Neither	9.9	44.6	38.4	17.7	26.9
No response	18.7	41.1	39.0	27.9	34.4

As indicated, 71.4% of the women said one or both parents encouraged them to pursue an education. Following this, women received encouragement to become involved in church and civic affairs.

The educational achievements of the women surveyed are recorded in Table 20.

TABLE 20

EDUCATION OF RESPONDENTS

Amount of Education	Percent of Women
1-4 years	.3
5-8 years	3.4
9-11 years	6.5
High school graduate	37.1
Some college, including business college	26.5
College graduate	15.0
Some postgraduate work	4.8
Graduate degree	4.8
No response	1.7

A breakdown by area of study of women who attended college or business school after high school graduation is given in Table 21.

TABLE 21

AREA OF STUDY IN COLLEGE OR BUSINESS SCHOOL

Area of Study	Percent
Humanities and Social Sciences	25
Biological and Physical Sciences, including Engineering	6
Business	23
Nursing	5
Education	23
Home Economics	6
Other	10
No response	1

The relatively large percentage of women majoring in business is partly accounted for by the fact that most of these women were attending business colleges.

Areas of concentration of the 28 women who pursued postgraduate work are given in Table 22.

TABLE 22

AREAS OF CONCENTRATION--POSTGRADUATE STUDY

Area of Study	Percent
Humanities and Social Sciences	39
Biological and Physical Sciences	4
Nursing	4
Education	25
Home Economics	7
Professional (law, medicine)	11
Other	4
No response	7

A provocative finding resulted from a comparison relating age of women in public office and level of education. Generally, younger persons are better educated than their elders in contemporary society. But, as Table 23 indicates, women officeholders in age brackets from 41 to 60 years are better educated than women under age 40. Although all women under 40 had a high school diploma, fewer went on to college than did women in the ages 41 to 60.

TABLE 23

RELATIONSHIP OF AGE AND EDUCATION IN RESPONDENTS

Age	No High School Diploma	High School Graduate	Some College	College Graduate	Total Number
	Percent				
40 or less	0	61	11	28	54
41-50	3	38	30	29	91
51-60	11	29	33	27	88
61 or more	31	28	28	13	54
No response					7

A comparison of levels of education with the amount of time a woman has worked reveals the following:

TABLE 24

RELATIONSHIP OF EDUCATION AND YEARS OF EMPLOYMENT

Education	3/4 or More of Adult Life	1/4 to 3/4 of Adult Life	None or Less than 1/4 of Adult Life	Total Number
	Percent			
No high school diploma	19	31	50	26
High school graduate	25	37	38	106
Some college	14	44	41	73
College graduate	27	31	41	70
No response				19

Membership in Organizations

Women in the United States have traditionally played a major role in community activities including the operation of many voluntary organizations. These organizations range from civic, such as the League of Women Voters, to political, professional, social, business or religious groups. Community organizations provide married women especially with an outlet outside of their home and family and with an opportunity to develop and exercise their talents and skills while performing a useful service for the community. Many women in the study noted that they had decided to enter political life after actively working with various organizations. Women officeholders were asked to list the number of organizations they belonged to and the ones in which they held office. Tables 25 and 26 contain this information.

TABLE 25

MEMBERSHIP IN ORGANIZATIONS

Number of Organizations	Percent
None	5.4
One	15.0
Two	12.9
Three	14.3
Four	10.5
Five	5.1
Six or seven	8.2
Eight or nine	1.7
Ten or more	.7
No response	26.2

TABLE 26

OFFICES HELD IN ORGANIZATIONS

Number of Organizations	Percent
None	11.6
One	20.7
Two	15.6
Three	11.6
Four	4.1
Five	3.1
Six or seven	2.0
Eight or nine	.7
Ten or more	.3
No response	30.3

A comparison between membership in organizations and the amount of education the woman officeholder had was also made.

TABLE 27

RELATIONSHIP OF EDUCATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Education	Number of Organizational Memberships			
	0-1	2-3	4 or More	Total Number
	Percent			
High school graduate or less	43	36	21	92
Some college	23	35	42	60
College graduate	9	39	52	64
No response				78

As Table 27 indicates, the more education a woman has, the more she is likely to belong to at least one and generally several organizations.

Public Office

The data in this section refers to the specific political activity of the respondents. For example, about 20% of the women initially held other public offices than the ones they are now holding. Tables 28, 29, and 30 indicate the number of years the women have served in office, how they initially entered office, and their political party preference.

TABLE 28

YEARS IN PRESENT OFFICE

Number of Years	Percent
One year or less . . .	11.6
Two years	17.7
3-5 years	21.8
6-10 years	22.1
11-15 years	9.2
16-20 years	8.5
21 years or more . . .	6.1
No response	3.1

TABLE 29

TOTAL NUMBER OF YEARS IN ALL PUBLIC OFFICES

Number of Years	Percent
One year or less . . .	9.9
Two years	15.0
3-5 years	17.3
6-10 years	23.8
11-15 years	10.2
16-20 years	13.3
21 years or more . . .	8.2
No response	2.4

TABLE 30

MANNER OF ATTAINING PUBLIC OFFICE

Initially Entered Office	Percent
Election	56.8
Appointment upon the death of husband	3.7
Appointment	36.1
No response	3.4

Other research has shown that many women are appointed to office upon the death of their husbands. For example, of the 78 women who have served in the U. S. Congress, 42% had husbands who served before them, and in most cases, these wives were appointed to fill their late husband's unexpired term.

The relatively high percentage of women who entered public office through appointment in Wisconsin is not as significant when it is noted that 21.8% of the offices surveyed were filled by appointment.

TABLE 31

OFFICE TIME OF PRESENT OFFICE

Office Time Commitment	Percent
Full-time	33.7
Part-time	63.9
No response	2.4

Tables 32 and 33 provide information on elected offices only.

TABLE 32

TYPE OF ELECTION TO OFFICE

Type of Election	Percent
Partisan	82
Nonpartisan	15
No response	3

TABLE 33

POLITICAL PARTY PREFERENCE OF RESPONDENTS

Political Party Preference -Partisan Elections Only-	Percent
Democratic	30
Republican	64
Independent	3
No response	3

It is important to note that three offices, those of state representatives, county clerk, and county treasurer accounted for most of the partisan elections. Women holding elected office were asked whether or not they planned to seek re-election and whether or not they will seek a different office. Their responses are given in Table 34.

Many of the women who were undecided stated that they would have to assess the political situation closer to the time of elections before deciding whether or not to seek a different public office. Others indicated that they were quite happy with their present office and would seek no other.

Sex as a Campaign Issue

In the study, women holding elected office were asked the following question: "Was your being a woman made an issue in your campaign for public office?" Table 35 records their responses:

TABLE 34

ELECTED OFFICEHOLDERS SEEKING RE-ELECTION OR DIFFERENT OFFICE

Will Seek Re-election	Percent
Yes	66
No	8
Don't know	24
No response	1

Will Run for Different Office	Percent
Yes	20
No	48
Don't know	31
No response	1

TABLE 35

SEX OF CANDIDATE AS CAMPAIGN ISSUE

Sex Made a Campaign Issue	Percent
Yes	11
Possibly	13
No	69
No response	7

These percentages remained relatively consistent regardless of the public office involved.

Disadvantages

Women officials were asked: "Do you encounter any particular problems in public office, whether elected or appointed, because you are a woman holding this position?" Table 36 gives their responses.

Several women who said they encountered no specific problems because they were women holding public office qualified their answers to include some general problems of women in public office. These included the following:

--Many people feel politics is not for women.

--Men hesitate to give leadership roles to women. Some male members of political bodies find it harder to accept a woman in public office.

--Women have to be better informed and prepared than their male counterparts. They cannot make mistakes, but the men can.

--Salary for some of the public offices is so low that no men want the job. If the salary were higher, men might resent women holding the position.

--Problems encountered are subtle and deal with attitudes. Some male officials do not take women officeholders seriously.

TABLE 36

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY
WOMEN OFFICEHOLDERS

Encountered Problems	Percent
Yes	17.3
Possibly	4.1
No	72.1
No response	6.4

Fully 72% of the women, though, said they encountered no problems being a woman in public office. One woman summed up this majority viewpoint: "Sex has no bearing on this question; any public official encounters problems."

Advantages

Women were also asked: "Are there any particular assets or advantages, in your opinion, to being a woman in public office?" The results are given in Table 37.

TABLE 37

ADVANTAGES OF WOMEN OFFICEHOLDERS

Advantages	Percent
Yes	33.7
Possibly	6.1
No	45.6
No response	14.6

These percentages remained fairly consistent even when each of the public offices under study was examined separately. Some of the advantages given by the women include the following:

--A woman has more time to devote to her office since she often does not work outside the home. She has more time to read and gather needed background information.

--A woman who does not hold an outside job is more readily available to her constituents. She therefore can handle many small matters before they become larger.

--People, especially other women, are more at ease in presenting their problems to a woman.

--In some respects, it is easier for women to approach certain types of problems.

--Women tend to be more interested in the role of government in health, welfare, and education and are more likely to be listened to regarding these problems.

--Women are better at secretarial and bookkeeping work and run a more efficient office. (This was mentioned by several women, mostly those holding the office of city or village clerk or treasurer, where such skills are apparently needed.)

Factors Influencing Decision to Seek Public Office

In an attempt to gain a better understanding of why some women run for public office, women holding elective positions were asked: "Which of the following was most important in influencing your decision positively to actually run for public office? Please rank in order of importance." Choices given were: family, other persons, educational background, work experience, membership in organizations and other. A breakdown is given in Table 38.

TABLE 38

FACTORS INFLUENCING DECISION TO SEEK ELECTION TO PUBLIC OFFICE

Factors	Most Important	Second Most Important	No Influence
	Percent		
Other persons, outside of family	31	26	19
Work experience	17	15	30
Family	17	13	34
Education	6	13	42
Membership in Organizations	3	10	51
Other	11	4	68

About 10% of the women did not answer the question.

Varied reasons were given by women who checked "other" as an important influence for them. These ranged from personal interest, to dissatisfaction with present officials and desire to be busy and involved. Several women explained that no one influenced them; they made their own decision to run for public office.

As Table 38 indicates, other persons and family exerted strong influences on a woman's decision to seek office. To further delineate what individuals exerted the most positive influence, all women--whether elected or appointed--were asked: "Please list in order of importance which five of the following persons influenced you positively to become actively involved in public life." Table 39 gives a partial breakdown of the responses received. About 15% of the women did not answer the question.

TABLE 39

PERSONS INFLUENCING WOMAN'S INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC LIFE

Persons Influencing Decision	Most Important	Second Most Important	No Influence
	Percent		
Husband	26.5	16.0	31.0
Male public officials	16.0	11.9	37.8
Female friends	9.5	9.9	42.2
Male friends	7.5	8.8	52.4
Children	6.1	9.2	53.7
Mother	3.4	6.1	66.0
Father	4.1	3.4	69.0
Female public officials	2.0	5.4	69.7
Business associates	2.7	2.4	69.4
Male neighbors	1.4	2.0	73.1
Female neighbors	1.4	1.4	71.4
Male teachers	1.0	0.7	79.3
Female teachers	0.7	1.0	76.9
Enemies	0.7	0.7	81.6
Others	3.7	1.4	74.1

Although the husband exerted the greatest influence on the respondents it is also important to note the high ranking received by male public officials. Many women reiterated the positive influence exerted by these officials in their open-ended responses. The influence of women public officials is significantly lower, perhaps due to the small number of women in public office.

Generally parental influence is also a minor factor. Although fathers ranked below mothers when combining the first and second most important influence factors, a higher percentage of women chose their fathers as a primary influence. Closer correlation between this and other factors such as placement in the family and parental involvement in public affairs might prove informative. For example, do more women who are only children, or the oldest child in the family rank their father as the primary influence on their decision to seek office? These and other questions will be further explored.

The questionnaire also gave women a chance to explain in greater detail, some of the factors which influenced their decision to seek public office. The questions were open-ended and most women were sufficiently interested and cooperative to describe these factors at length. Educational experiences, especially bookkeeping and secretarial courses taken, were cited by some of the women as an influence. Organizational involvement, particularly in the League of Women Voters, was another influence mentioned. Various jobs women had held were also influencial in their decisions to seek public office.

The underlying reason, in many cases, seemed to be that women developed certain skills and resultant confidence in their abilities, and therefore, felt qualified to assume a particular public office. Many of the reasons were personal, such as a desire for personal satisfaction or a need to help with family finances.

Some further explanations of women regarding their motivation to seek public office follow:

--Male candidates running for office were not qualified for the position.

--Taxes were too high and something had to be done about this.

--The woman was the breadwinner and needed a better job to support her family. In some other families, the woman wanted to help with family finances.

--Family, especially her husband, encouraged the woman to seek office.

--Other good jobs for women were lacking, especially in the smaller cities and villages.

--Woman had served as deputy official and when the elected official retired, she sought election to the post. (This was mentioned largely by women serving as clerks or treasurers.)

--Woman wanted to become involved in activities outside of her immediate family. Woman with small children felt this was one way to become involved in community affairs without neglecting her home and family.

--Woman was nominated at a municipal caucus and her name was placed on the ballot. (This occurred mainly in smaller communities.)

--Woman was interested in and wanted to serve her community.

Handicaps

Although their reasons for entering public office varied considerably, the women generally seemed pleased with their position and the challenges it offered them. But many also encountered certain handicaps that they, as individuals, had to overcome. These were revealed in the open-ended responses to the following question: "Please explain, in detail, what particular handicaps, if any, you had to overcome." Only women holding elected office were asked to respond to this question.

Some of the handicaps mentioned were closely related to being wives and mothers while others were more general. Following are some of the handicaps women said they encountered and had to overcome:

--Feelings of inadequacy.

--Not being accepted by other women.

--Not being accepted by men, especially those in public office.

--Being young and a woman.

--Disliking public speaking and campaigning.

--Needing to find adequate time to care for family. (This was mentioned mainly by women with small children.)

--Needing husband's approval to seek office.

These responses were the most frequently mentioned and were consistent across offices.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study of women in public life in Wisconsin is, by its very nature, exploratory since little research of this kind has yet been published. Although this report is preliminary and further analysis and interpretation is necessary, several significant factors have emerged.

An unusually high number of women in office have parents or other relatives who held public office. More women over the age of 50 were in office than those under 50 years of age. Women in the study indicated that they identify more closely with their mothers than with their fathers. Also, education alone does not seem to be as important a factor as one might have expected.

A preliminary analysis of cross-tabulations between age and education of women in public office revealed additional findings. Although in the general population younger persons tend to be better educated than their elders, younger women in office have less college education than older women. This may be an indication that advanced education is not a major factor for women seeking public office unless they are older.

This type of preliminary analysis leads to the conclusion that, when considering women in public office, certain already established relationships between variables may not hold true for this group.

Additional comparison and analysis between variables and between women who are in public office and those who are not (our control groups) are presently being undertaken to provide further insights into why some women chose to enter public life.

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for additional reading)

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